Will's Mom AU

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Will's Mom AU

by afterdarkthirty

Summary

post-Fromage au. Will may not know much about family, but a surprise visit from his past makes him reconsider the concept. And makes him reconsider Hannibal.

Notes

This started off as a writing exercise with the prompt about an estranged parent coming back into a character's life. Then it just became--this.

Also for some reason, I did not work Abigail into this story so she isn't mentioned whatsoever. Just imagine she's in the background trying to heal and move on from her trauma while her adopted dads work their shit out.

Chapter 1

They're in a diner booth and Will knows Hannibal's skin must be crawling. No matter how calmly he sits, how he straightens his silverware and lightly lays his cheap paper napkin in his lap, Will knows the stench of grease and burnt coffee has got to be torture.

"I'm perfectly alright, Will," Hannibal says.

Will smiles. Damn mind reader. "We can still go somewhere else," Will says.

"I think after the scene today, your comfort is more important than my own," Hannibal says, folding his hands together on the table. "Besides, it is rather difficult to ruin ham and vegetables." He tilts the dessert menu towards him with his forefinger. "And the pie looks promising."

Will snorts. He doubts the place will even have fresh vegetables, but it feels like home, diners always have.

"It must be a place of familiar comfort to you," Hannibal says.

"God, stop it, I'm the one with the empathy disorder," Will says, covering his laugh with his hand and meeting Hannibal's eyes.

"I told you, Will," Hannibal says, "I can't turn mine off any more than you can."

It should be wrong to smile after standing over a body, but Hannibal's idea to bring him here is the balm over this shitastic day. Dead children are always the hardest to look at.

Then a woman stands in front of their booth with a cautious smile. She's wearing a button-down shirt from a different decade and shifts back and forth on her feet. Will stares at the raised veins on her pale hands. "I apologize for interrupting," she says. Her voice is soft but strong and she holds her hands close to her stomach. "Will Graham," she says.

Will frowns. Since Freddie's mushroom killer article, he rarely gets pleasant reactions from her readers. "Yes? Do I know you?"

He risks looking at her face and she smiles. When he takes in her curly gray hair slipping out of her braid and her intense blue eyes, her longing and love hits him like a wave. He knows her, or knew her. He can't do this.

"Hannibal, let's go," Will says. He gets up and edges out of the booth.

"Will, baby, I just want to talk, that's all," the woman says.

Hannibal gets up, politely excusing himself as he steps around the woman. She follows them into the parking lot.

"Will please," the woman says.

Will waits at the passenger side, silent. Hannibal opens the door with his keys and Will has one foot in the car when the woman grabs the door.

"You knew things then too," she says. "You knew when me and your daddy were fighting. You knew when I was sad. Even before you could talk, you knew who needed help without them saying a word. And right now? You're angry because you think I didn't love you and you've carried that question around for years until you actually believed you ain't loveable but I'm here to tell you I loved you then, I love you now, I never left because I didn't love you."

Will looks at his mother's pleading blue eyes and he remembers a faint memory of sitting between her ankles on a porch with a toy car in his hands. "You're mistaken," he says. "You've got me confused with someone else." He glares at her hand until she removes it.

"Remember I love you bab--"

He shuts the door. "Please drive," he says, facing forward. Hannibal pulls out of the parking lot and onto the highway back to Wolftrap.

They've put some distance between themselves and the diner when Hannibal says, "You told me you didn't remember your mother."

"I didn't," Will says, "not until I saw her."

Hannibal nodded, appeased. "So you don't want to hear why she removed herself from your life?"

"Can we not--have a session today, right now?" Will asks.

"I'm asking as your friend, Will."

Will looks out the passenger window. The trees whizzing by and the soft leather seats soothe Will's nerves, but he keeps seeing his mother's pleading face. She wasn't lying about anything she said, he is sure of it. What to do with that information is another matter.

"I didn't know she had your gift," Hannibal says after a while.

"I didn't know either," Will says. "My father never told me."

"Hmmm," Hannibal hums. "When my uncle Robert came to retrieve me from the orphanage, he looked like a younger version of my father but he was also a stranger. He told me we were family, but it was many years until I felt that for him."

"You're trying to say she's my mother and I should hear her out?" Will asks turning back towards Hannibal. "Don't waste time and all that?"

Hannibal hesitates, then reaches out and lays his hand on top of Will's hand. "I am saying we choose our families," he says, glancing at Will quickly, then back at the road, removing his hand. "She is only your family when you decide she is."

Will's hand tingles but he doesn't move it. Hannibal could be implying that he sees Will as family, which is the obvious assumption to make, or he's just being a friend comforting a friend after a run-in with an estranged mom. It's too soon for Hannibal to consider him family. Isn't it? Does he? He looks at Hannibal's profile and remembers the relief that flooded him when he found Hannibal hurt but alive. And sure, he helped the man get home and called to check on him daily. That's just being friendly. Right? It's too soon to ask for more but has to let Hannibal know, at least a little, that he appreciates the man.

"You're a good man, Hannibal," Will said and grasps Hannibal's shoulder, squeezing briefly before returning to his side of the car.

Hannibal swallows and Will feels that aura, that thing that rumbles behind his perfect facade; a darkness that Will noticed when Hannibal was trying to pretend he was shaken by Budge's death and Will knew by looking at him that he wasn't. Then the feeling is gone. Hannibal turns on a classic rock station, and Will settles into his seat, pushing the moment out of his mind.

He still has a child killer to help catch. His mother has decided to return out of the blue. And Hannibal's friendship is the only thing that feels how Will imagines family should feel.

Chapter 2

It's another fruitless briefing. No new leads. Six dead kids from three states with no signs of assault, injury, or captivity. Frustrated is a polite word for how Will feels.

When he and Hannibal step outside Quantico and into the frigid October air, Will spots his mother leaning against his car. "Christ," he runs a hand down his face. She spots him and waves.

"Should I call security?" Hannibal asks, standing behind him.

"I'll handle it," Will says.

On the walk over, he decides to play this as a case of mistaken identity, which isn't hard since he doesn't know her.

"You look just like your gran'daddy just now," she says, smiling. Her coat looks like a man's working coat and is clearly too big for her. She must have friends, a husband somewhere, someone she stayed for.

"Ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to leave," Will says. "If you show up again, I will call security."

She holds up her hands. "I ain't staying, relax," she says. She runs her eyes over his face, committing him to memory. "I said most of what I had to say."

"Oh goodie, there's more," he says.

His mother raises an eyebrow. Then she smiles and Will feels her longing so intensely, that he has to look away. "I'm sorry," she says. "I won't look directly at you, how's that?"

Will shoves his hands in his pockets. "Speak and go," he says.

"That man, the fancy one?" She nods towards Hannibal, who is standing next to his car and staring at them.

"What about him?" Will asks.

"He cares for you," she says. "A lot, deeply, like," she trails off, looking at Hannibal then closes her eyes. "Like he's a knight and you're the holy grail."

Will doesn't know what to say. No one in his life has ever referred to him as holy anything.

"He's possessive, baby," she says, looking at Will's shoulder. "Men like him hold on too tightly." She shakes her head and looks back at Will assessing him. Will can't help it, he fidgets under scrutiny but he doesn't leave. He's not the one that does that.

"But you won't run, will you? Nah, you ain't like me," she says, getting off Will's car and studying his face. "And you won't break 'cause you ain't like your daddy neither." She stands in front of Will, reaches up and cups his cheek. "Y'all match, you'll see." She tugs his head down and when they lock eyes, Will sees her love, her regret, her pain of figuring out her gift all on her own, the isolation she imposes on herself still because there is no one she can stay for, and a secret but she closes her eyes. " Will Boudreaux Graham. You're the man I'd always hoped you'd be," she whispers and lets him go. "You'll see. Goodbye and be careful, baby. Mama loves you always."

Without giving him a chance to respond, she walks over to Hannibal and says something to him. Hannibal's face betrays nothing. He nods at her, then watches her walk towards the bus stop at the edge of the parking lot.

Will comes over. "What did she say to you," he asks.

"She asked me to watch over you," he says.

Will avoids looking at Hannibal's face, his mother's words still ringing in his ears. "Are we still meeting up tonight? Barring another call to a scene," Will asks.

Hannibal nods. "Seven-thirty," he says and gets into his Bentley.

"I'll be there," Will taps the hood and waves before crossing back and getting into his own car.

Classes are canceled while all hands are on deck for this case, so Will heads home to his dogs and case files to try to figure this out. Anything to avoid cycling over the conversation with his mother about Hannibal.

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They don't have their session that night.

One ravenstag hallucination, one phone call with Jack, another canceling with Hannibal, an all-nighter combing through trash collected from twenty trashcans, and Will finds the link: A pamphlet for a regional study. Twenty-four hours later, they have Anderson Barrett in custody, confessed, and Will is back home keyed up still. It's probably needy, but he calls Hannibal anyway.

"Will," Hannibal says. There's talking and laughter in the background.

"Oh, you're busy. I can call back later," Will says.

"No, it's alright." There's movement, a door closes, and it's suddenly quiet over the phone. "Is everything alright?"

"Just wanted to let you know we caught the child killer," Will says, cringing at himself.

"Jack told me but thank you for letting me know. You did a great thing today Will," Hannibal says.

Everyone is saying it but Will didn't feel great that it took was a figment of his imagination nosing around his trashcan to break the case.

"Thank you, Hannibal. Well, I'll let you get back to your party--"

"Would you like to come by?" Hannibal asks. "There's plenty of food, but I'm afraid your face was on the news, so you'll be a bit of a celebrity."

"That's alright, thanks for the offer anyway. I think I'll just head into bed early tonight," Will says.

"Then I'll see you next Thursday then," Hannibal says, but then he pauses. "I do consider you a good friend, Will, and if you'd like to come by before Thursday, for anything, I hope you'll ask."

Will is thrown. It's a friendly gesture, but it feels more intimate than just inviting a friend over for drinks. His mother's words come back to him, 'Like he's a knight and you're the holy grail."

"Thank you Hannibal but I--"

"No trouble at all," Hannibal says. Will hears a door open and party sounds fill up the call. "Sleep well and I'll see you Thursday.

"I'll see you Thursday," Will says.

Hannibal hangs up and Will feels like he missed something, like Hannibal had extended a hand and Will missed grasping it.

He'd find out on Thursday.

Chapter 3

Hannibal opens the door to his office in an oxblood suit, with perfect hair that doesn't even move, and a smile that is one hundred percent professional. "Will," he says. "Come in."

Will ducks his head and walks past Hannibal feeling like the guilty party and not knowing why.

"How was your week?" Hannibal asks. He sits in his chair and crosses his legs, a pad on the side table.

"Are we having a session, doctor?" Will asks, dropping his bag next to his seat, the patient chair. He didn't wander around, he didn't touch Hannibal's books, and he didn't sit on Hannibal's desk or in his chair. Will plops into the chair across from Hannibal like any other patient and it feels--wrong.

"These are just conversations," Hannibal says. "But this is also your time."

Will tilts his head. "Are we friends having conversations or doctor and patient having conversations?"

Hannibal looks away and tilts his pad just so until it is parallel with his pen on his side table. He folds his hands back in his lap and Will wants to shake him out of this painful politeness.

"These conversations are whatever you need them to be--"

"Stop," Will leans forward, holding his head in his hands, "Just stop, alright. The politeness, the insincerity--"

"I am always polite and sincere, Will--"

"Not like THIS," Will says raising his voice. Hannibal's face is a mask of blank calm. He thought this was about refusing Hannibal's invitation but Will had refused those before. This is something else. "What did she say to you?" Will asks.

"To whom are you referring?"

Will laughs. "My mother. You know? About yay-high and looks like me?" He sighs out his frustration. "What did she say to you last week at Quantico?"

Hannibal opens his mouth--

"--and please don't lie. No partial truths. No lies by omission. The whole truth this time."

Hannibal sighs and looks at his hands. "She told me to watch over you," he says.

Will covers his eyes. He feels Hannibal is about to lie to him and he wants to scream.

"She told me to come clean about whatever I'm playing because if you found out I lied from anyone else, I would never have all of you," Hannibal says.

Will's hands fall limp at his sides. Has Hannibal been studying him all this time? Is there a paper coming out soon on the elusive Will Graham, psychological marvel? How did he read this all wrong? "And what are you lying about?" He asks but turns away towards the windows. He can't look at Hannibal and hear this at the same time.

Hannibal sighs. "When I smelled you a couple weeks ago, I detected a whiff of encephalitis, a brain infection. If it's true, then that's the source of your nightmares, fevers, and sleepwalking."

Will nods to himself. So not just studying his brain then, but studying his brain while infected. Great.

Will gets up and stands behind his chair, gripping the back of it and rocking on his feet. He should've known. This connection could only be a fantasy in his head like everything else. "And why would you not tell me that?" Will asks.

"It served my interest not to tell you at this time, until..." Hannibal trails off.

"Until what? I died and you could publish your paper guilt-free?"

"No," Hannibal says. "I would never risk your life nor publish anything about your life or what you've told me."

And Will wants to believe. Hannibal seems so sincere, the distress on his face cracking his blank mask, but Will has to know. If Hannibal looks at Will like he's the holy grail, according to his mother, then what is motivating Hannibal to weave this lie?

"Then whose life is at risk if I'm not sick?"

Hannibal says nothing. Will holds his hands out in front of him. He's waiting but Hannibal won't look at him now, his eyes fixed on a patch of carpet near Will's chair.

"Hannibal?"

Hannibal looks up then and Will's heart stutters. That thing that Will felt hovering within Hannibal, the unseen thing that seemed barely held back when their hands brushed or when they locked eyes over a body, the thing that lurked in the car with them briefly when Will called Hannibal a good man, well, Hannibal shows him that thing now. Will looks away.

Behind Hannibal on the wall, a picture of the Wound Man has replaced the pencil drawing of the Duomo, but the piece is off. Will moves closer, not sure why the drawing bugs him until he sees the extra sword in the side...just like the Chesapeake Ripper's victim before Miriam Lass.

Will laughs. He's sweating up a storm suddenly, chills crawling under his skin, and he laughs, resting his head against the glass frame. The realization clicks together and Will understands too well how Hannibal Lecter, respected psychiatrist and his friend, is also Hannibal, the Chesapeake Ripper.

Will knows Hannibal is behind him without even looking, though the man didn't make a sound.

"Don't turn me into art," Will says. "Just make it look like I ran off or something," he swallows, "and uh--please find a home for my dogs. They're good dogs, I don't want them back at a shelter--"

"I'm not going to kill you, Will," Hannibal says.

"But you can't let me live knowing what I know now," Will says.

"Can you live with what you know?" Hannibal asks.

Will shrugs, still pressing his forehead harder against the art frame. "I don't know," he says, "I haven't really had time to process it."

He feels a pinch in his neck and everything goes black.

Chapter 4

Will wakes and he can tell by the beeping next to him and the cold, scratchy bedding that he's in a hospital.

So Hannibal didn't kill him, that was nice. He flexes his fingers and toes, and tests his arms when a hand touches his shoulder. "Will," Alana says.

"Alana," Will says, his voice hoarse. She's sitting next to him in what looks like the world's most uncomfortable chair. "Alana--Hanni--" God, his throat feels like warm gravel scraped it raw. His tongue is thick and won't cooperate.

"Shh, shh, it's okay, don't try to talk," Alana says, putting her book down and pushing his hair back. "Your awake," she says smiling.

"Han--is--Hanni--is the--"

"Hannibal is fine," she says smiling. "You collapsed in his office, but he brought you in. You've been out for five days."

Will grabs her arm, "Hannibal," he swallows and fuck it hurts, "is--"

"Here," Hannibal says, sweeping into the room with a tote bag. "And ready for my shift. I can take over now Alana."

Alana looks between the two, still leaning over Will and Will still grabbing her arm. He can't let go, not yet, not until she knows--

"Unless I'm interrupting something," Hannibal says, and though his face shows amusement, Will sees a veiled warning when Hannibal looks at Alana, then Will.

"No, no," Alana says, pulling away from Will. "I think he's a little out of it."

Will shuts his eyes. Alana is about to leave him alone with the Chesapeake fucking Ripper and there's nothing he can do about it.

Alana grabs her purse and leans over Will, brushing his hair back with a fond smile. "See ya, Will. Get better." She smiles because she doesn't know who she's in the room with.

Hannibal stands at the foot of his bed holding his bag in front of him, and as Alana passes, her hand lingers on Hannibal's arm. She gives him a soft smile. He nods at her and says low, "I will call you soon," and Alana leaves, giving a small smile to Will.

Hannibal sets his bag on the patient table and begins taking out Tupperware. "You're probably not up to heavy foods, so I have a few soups and stews for you to choose from," Hannibal says.

Will says nothing.

Hannibal sets up three bowls on the bed table with three spoons and a large, white dinner napkin, then pushes the table over to Will. He even adjusts the table to the perfect height and tilts Will's bed until Will is sitting upright comfortably.

Will watches it all in silence.

"Silkie chicken soup which you've had before, a beef vegetable stew made with beef shoulder and root vegetables in a red wine broth, and a simple lentil soup simmered with organic liver and sweet potatoes. All made with homemade bone broth simmered for three days to extract the marrow. This should settle the stomach and ease the healing process, and at the very least, it should help you feel better," Hannibal says.

Will looks at each bowl. Beef shoulder, liver, bone marrow. Then it hits him what Hannibal does with the trophies.

He barely makes it to the trashcan next to his bed before he vomits.

"The antivirals shouldn't cause this," Hannibal says and rushes over, putting a hand on Will's back. "Are you experiencing stomach pains?"

"Get the hell away from me," Will grits out.

Hannibal backs off.

Will spits the taste out of his mouth and when he leans back, Hannibal has removed the bowls and placed a cup of water. Will stares at it.

"I haven't poisoned the water Will," Hannibal says.

Will glares but gives the water a sniff. He takes a sip and the coolness eases his throat all the way down to his chest. At least Hannibal can't put people in his water. Then he laughs to himself.

Hannibal frowns. "Hysteria is not a good sign," he reaches forward but Will slaps his hands away.

"I was thinking," Will says, his voice still gravely, "that at least you can't put people in the water."

It's eerie the way Hannibal's face falls blank.

"But there are definitely people in the stew, right? The 'beef'?" Will chuckles to himself.

Hannibal sits in the chair at Will's bedside. "How long have you known?"

Will pushes the table away, he can't even begin to think about food at the moment. "Just now," he says. "You were right. If my brain wasn't on fire, and if you hadn't convinced me you cared about me, I would've spotted you immediately."

"I care for you deeply, Will."

"Is that why you're with Alana now?" Fuck, he did not intend to say that out loud.

Hannibal smiles. "She is insurance. I didn't know how you would react when you awoke and keeping her close might prevent you from a hasty action."

Will hates the relief he feels that Hannibal is not with Alana. "You and Alana are a little less pressing than the fact that you murder, display, and eat people."

"You brought it up Will," Hannibal says.

Will clenches his teeth hard.

"Ask me anything," Hannibal says softly, "and I will tell you the truth."

He should grab the call button. Or maybe lull Hannibal into complacency and then call Jack. A good man would scream and rattle his bed frame, not sit calmly with a killer letting curiosity override his morals. Is this the man his mother hoped he would be?

"How would I even know you're telling the truth?" Will asks, staring at the water cup in front of him. He hates how small his voice sounds. He hates how small he feels.

"Look at me, Will," Hannibal says.

But Will can't. He sees too much already and a childish part of him can't bear to face his only friend and see a monster.

"Look at me, Will."

"No," Will says.

Chapter 5

Will looks at Hannibal's chin, shoulder, anywhere but his intense gaze burning into Will's face. The monster and the man gaze at him with an appearance of calmness, but Will can feel a hundred scenarios that Hannibal has planned should this conversation not go the way Hannibal hopes.

Will cannot live if he refuses Hannibal. He doesn't know if he can live with himself by accepting Hannibal either. He's always considered himself a good man, not exceptional, but decent enough, and he wants to continue being a good man, but he needs answers for why the closest friend he's ever had is the most prolific artistic serial killer he's ever known.

"Why did you kill those people?" Will asks.

"Because they were rude and useless and now they're not," Hannibal says. He leans back in his chair and folds his hands in his lap. Will knows better than to a predator that looks relaxed. "So what?" Will asks, "you murder everyone that cuts you off on the highway or doesn't say 'excuse me' when they walk by?"

Hannibal frowns. "There are levels to rudeness, Will," he says with an eerie stillness. "Some are tolerable and some are not."

"Define intolerable."

Hannibal sniffs and brushes his jacket off.

"You said you'd answer anything I asked," Will says.

"Then ask a question, Will. I do not answer commands," Hannibal says.

It's a warning. Will takes another sip of his water, easing his throat again. He doesn't want to admit it but sitting upright and talking are wearing on him. The soups Hannibal brought aren't looking too bad either on his empty stomach.

There are other questions to ask, details, and damning evidence that could get Hannibal put away for three lifetimes, but fatigue weighs on Will, making him sluggish and forcing him to ask the only question that really matters to him. "Why me," he asks. "Was it because I was the only one who could see you? Why not just kill me and be done with it? Use my death to taunt Jack and continue your life?"

Hannibal opens his mouth and closes it. He leans forward, running over the words in his mind. Will uses the last of his conscious strength to focus on Hannibal. If he lies, well, Will's lived a good life, but he won't cave to a man that used him and never cared for him to begin with. He also knows he can scratch Hannibal to at least prove with his corpse that they fought. Hannibal won't get away with this.

Hannibal rests his hands on Will's bed, close but not touching Will's thigh. "I had heard about you from Alana," he begins. "When Jack called for a consult, I was curious if you could spot me immediately but when you didn't, I was fascinated. Watching you work drew me in, and I originally planned to learn about you and erode your credibility as the encephalitis ravaged your brain."

Will clenched his hands into tight fists. He looked at Hannibal's hands, his head bowed forward in shame, and catalogues all the places he could scratch before Hannibal realized what happened.

"And then you opened up to me," carefully, Hannibal slides one hand across the sheets and rests his fingers on Will's thigh, "I found myself worried about you, hating what your work did to you, hating Jack for sending you out again and again." He looks up at Will then, his eyes open and pained but Will looks past him, "and when your mother spoke to me, I knew she was right," Hannibal says, "but if we treated the encephalitis, you would see me anyway. And run."

It is in this moment that Will hates him and hates the tears welling up because Hannibal isn't lying and that means not everything has been a lie and his mother was telling the truth and fuck, he jams his fists into his eyes. How can he be a good man and his match is a killer?

Hannibal pulls him into his chest, cupping his head with one hand. "Give me twenty-four hours and I will disappear," he says. "I will leave you in peace. All you have to do is ask."

Will finds himself clutching at Hannibal, at every part of him he can reach, "Don't leave," he says and he hates himself for it. "Don't leave."

Maybe his mother was wrong and Will isn't as good as anyone thought.

Chapter 6

Hannibal doesn't leave.

Not during Will's recovery in the hospital. Not even when Will sleeps most of the time because fatigue makes it difficult to be awake for long. He brings Will soups and stews, all animal-based, and leaves Will books from Will's library when he has patients. They don't talk. Alana visits and fills the silence with her voice and updates from the team. There are no Ripper bodies but a few low-level serial killers that Jack and the team catch without Will.

Things are nice. Quiet.

Will is waiting for it all to end.

On the day of Will's release from the hospital, Hannibal brings Will to his house in Baltimore. "So you've decided to eat me at last," he says, still grumpy and tired. The post-viral fatigue makes sitting upright a conscious effort. He doesn't feel the need to hold back his gruff for Hannibal, or anyone right now.

"No one is on the menu for tonight," Hannibal says smiling, "but for the next couple of weeks you cannot be alone, so, here we are," Hannibal says.

They pull into Hannibal's driveway and a package is on the porch.

"Did you order something from Amazon?" Will asks.

"I didn't order anything," Hannibal says frowning.

Hannibal gets out and examines the package. Then picks it up, opens his front door, and enters the house.

Will gets out, using the car door to hold himself up, but his arms aren't as strong as he thought. They shake as he pulls himself around the car door, and nearly give out when Hannibal comes back and rushes to him, pulling him to lean against the hood. "You should've waited--"

"I'm fine," Will waves him off. "What was in the box?"

Hannibal doesn't say anything. He grabs Will's bags in one arm and uses the other to support Will against his side. Slowly, they walk to the front door and into Hannibal's study. Hannibal

deposits Will on the couch and takes his bags to a guest room before coming back with a bottle of water and the package. "It's for you," Hannibal says and disappears again.

Will hunts through his coat pockets until he finds the pocket knife he always carries and slices through the tape. He lifts the flaps expecting some kind of murder present but finds only scrunched up newspaper inside. Pulling it out, he makes a neat pile next to himself and sees a bundle of thin books tied together with a note taped on top.

The letter is brief. His mother's will required a bundle of photo albums to be sent to him after her passing. Will checks the lid of the box and sees his name but Hannibal's address. Why would she assume he was here? And how did she know where Hannibal lived?

He opens the first book and it is a Bible with a cracked leather cover and gilded edges on the paper. Inside, the first page reads "Boudreaux Family" in handwritten calligraphy and a dozen or so names Will doesn't recognize. At the bottom are Josephine Anna Boudreaux and Beau William Graham. Underneath it is William Boudreaux Graham. His mother was an only child just like him.

Hannibal comes in while Will is staring at the Bible. "A family heirloom?" He asks.

"My mama," he clears his throat, "my mother died," he says. "Recently, I think." He closes the Bible and grabs another book. "Her final wishes included sending me this. I don't know why it came to your house instead of mine."

"May I?"

Will nods and Hannibal sits next to him, crumpling the newspaper into a tight ball in his hands. "Perhaps she wanted you to know where you came from."

Will scoffed. "She wanted to be remembered because there was no one else left to do it."

Hannibal picks up the Bible and looks at the front page while Will opens the first photo album. It's a set of baby pictures with a handwritten "Josie" under each one. Next are some painfully awkward '50s school photos along with some flaking backyard barbecue shots. His mother doesn't smile in any of them. Will keeps flipping, watching his mother grow tall and awkward like him. The book ends around high school.

He picks up another photo album. This one is slim and small, like a pocket notebook. When he opens it, he sees his father's writing and pasted in photos of his parents when they were young. Will can't recall ever seeing them smile like that. "For you when we're old," it says under a picture taken at a fair, a ferris wheel in the background. His father is holding his mother like a lifeline, pressing a grin to her cheek and crossing his arms over her stomach. She reaches back with one hand holding his head, the other clutching his arm. They look as if they'll never let each other go.

"You come from an old Louisiana family, Will," Hannibal says, bringing Will's attention back, "stretching all the way back to colonial times."

Will smiles then. "It's a shame I can't be a Duke or a Count too."

Hannibal closes the Bible. "Having a title doesn't ease the loss of family," he says.

There is something Hannibal isn't saying but Will ignores it. He isn't ready to talk and Hannibal clearly has things he'd rather keep to himself as well. They're still at this--impasse--where Will can't look at Hannibal but can't let him go either.

He's still hurt and angry. A part of him burns to make Hannibal feel this betrayal, but he's also tired. Tired of pretending he doesn't see Hannibal's love in every gesture, even in the lack of artfully arranged bodies while Will recovers.

"I think I need to lay down," Will says. He stands and wobbles but Hannibal catches him with one arm and steers him towards the stairs. "If you need a break, tell me," Hannibal says and slowly they ascend until they get to the top and Will is panting.

Hannibal pauses.

"Just get me to the room," Will says, breathing hard.

They walk slowly until Hannibal stops at an open door. "I have two guest rooms but yours has an ensuite. If it doesn't suit you, let me know," he says. "My room," he points across the hall, "is right there so if you yell for anything, I will hear you. You will also have a cell phone to call me. The number is already programmed."

Will nods as he hangs on to Hannibal's shoulder with one arm. "Got it."

Hannibal steers them into the guest bedroom. He turns to help Will sit on the bed but Will feels unbalanced. He doesn't know if he trips or vertigo hits him but right as Hannibal leans him back, Will's feet slip against the carpet. On instinct, he grabs at Hannibal, jerking the man forward and on top of him on the mattress.

Will pants in the lamp light, mortified, until he sees Hannibal looking directly into his eyes.

This is how their impasse ends.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This is why Will avoided looking at Hannibal.

He isn't aware of Hannibal's weight on top of him or his own thighs rising up around Hannibal's hips because the heavy emotions Hannibal has held back roll over Will, flooding him entirely.

He knew about Hannibal's longing, that wasn't a surprise. He just didn't know how deep it ran. He isn't sure Hannibal himself is aware of the full extent of it, but with their eyes locked on each other, Hannibal can't hide.

And Will sees it all.

He sees the monster that revels in blood and art is intimately connected with the man who loves him as if he is the holy grail.

And the monster loves him too.

He loves Will enough to quit killing, quit cannibalism, upend his life, and this terrifies the man Will has come to know.

He sees Hannibal's hopes, his fears, his cold pragmatism, his inconvenient compassion, his desires, and a plethora of futures they could live together, blood-drenched or blood-free. He sees family--

Hannibal shuts his eyes and leans back. "My deepest apologies," he says, trying to rise up and off of Will, but Will fights through his fatigue and drags Hannibal into a kiss.

Hannibal freezes.

Will pulls away slowly. Maybe he pushed too far, he thinks, but he knows he didn't read the man wrong, especially with Hannibal's desire evident in his eyes and pressing against Will.

"You're still recovering," Hannibal says.

It's weak but Will can see Hannibal is hanging on to his restraint by the thinnest thread.

Will wants to snap that restraint between his teeth, and that realization shocks him more than the fact that Hannibal's desires to own, to possess, to devote himself entirely, match Will's.

But Hannibal is right. He's already drained from going up the stairs and trying to keep Hannibal on top of him is taking the last of his strength. He loosens the grip of his thighs and Hannibal gets to his feet. Carefully, Hannibal strips Will to his shirt and boxers, then helps him get under the thick comforter. Very clinical, very discrete. He senses Hannibal's vulnerability and decides to pretend the kiss didn't happen. For now.

Yet before Will can thank Hannibal, he's gone from the room.

~~*~~

Days float into weeks as Will recovers and Hannibal avoids him except when necessary. The man even tries to keep a nurse, but Will decides to be the most petulant, bratty patient known to man and the nurse eventually gives up. Will felt bad about it, but not enough to give Hannibal the space the man so clearly wanted. They were in this together and Will at least wants to talk one more time before he ends up on Hannibal's table.

Hannibal even takes to leaving Will's meals on the bedside table and bathing him when Will's meds force him to sleep, leaving Will to wake up refreshed and confused.

Hannibal wants him, that much is clear, but his avoidance itches under Will's skin. He should've known Hannibal was just biding his time.

~~*~~

A banging wakes Will--deep, hollow, erratic thumps, that rise then stop.

Will sits up. Hannibal's house is silent again.

A burglar wouldn't make that much noise, not with Hannibal's Bentley in the driveway. A killer either. The thumps start again.

Will slips out of bed in his boxers and t-shirt, thankful his strength has mostly returned to him and goes across the hall to Hannibal's room. The shades are open. The bed is made.

The thumps grow louder. Muffled yelling echoes from downstairs.

He creeps down the steps with bare feet, wishing for any kind of weapon, but Hannibal keeps a largely weapon-free house. Shocking for a killer.

The yelling isn't muffled anymore. A man is screaming and hitting something. Another person grunts with each thump.

Will enters the kitchen and the pantry door is open. A light shines from a trap door in the floor and Will knows he's staring at the doorway to the Chesapeake Ripper's kill room.

A head rises up suddenly, and a man scrambles up through the hatch door, panting and sticky with blood on one side of his face. He spots Will by the counter and rushes over. "He got you

too? We gotta go. I knocked him out but I don't know if he's out. Man, C'mon," the man pulls Will's arm. Will lets himself be pulled but his mind knows Hannibal is downstairs, knocked out, alone.

It would be easier to tell people he made the decision at this moment, with a scared, bloody man dragging him to safety, but Will made his choice when Hannibal revealed himself with the drawing of the Wounded Man. He just couldn't accept it then. He would always choose Hannibal.

Will snatches up a knife left carelessly on a cutting board.

"Perfect," the man says, glancing at it, "in case that fucker gets up."

Will buries the knife in the man's neck, nearly severing the muscle in two. The spray is warm and thick on Will's face and he closes his eyes as the man grips the knife. "What--the fuck," the man gurgles before ripping out the knife and dropping to his knees.

This kill is too quick for Will, but the way the man flops to the floor, staring up at Will for help appeases the bloodlust still roaring inside him.

The man twitches and reaches out, scrabbling against the tile with one hand and holding his neck with the other. Will is impressed the man is lasting this long. When the man gasps one last time, Will feels a peace settle over him that he had only felt in Hannibal's office when it was just the two of them shutting out the world.

He closes his eyes and listens to the hum of the refrigerator and his own heartbeat until he hears a quiet panting by the trap door.

Will turns towards the hatch and Hannibal leans heavily against the pantry doorway, panting and holding his arm.

Will knows this was Hannibal's plan all along; send out a threat and see what Will would do. Wind him up. Watch him go. And he's enraged that all the weeks of avoiding him--them--have culminated in a dead guy bleeding out in Hannibal's hallway and a rage-hard on Will knows Hannibal can see.

Yet, they match, his mother told him, and with blood on his face and joy over his kill, Will sees the truth as she saw it in their eyes. He won't run like his mother, scared of what she would see in her lover. He won't break like his father, a man unable to hold a wild thing who sees too much. He sees Hannibal clearly and Hannibal sees him. They are tied in a way that feels like they share the same blood in their veins and one heart.

Will crosses the distance between them and grabs Hannibal by the face, jerking him down into a kiss. Stunned, Hannibal freezes but soon responds, licking and nipping hard at Will's lips, backing him into the kitchen island but Will isn't having it. He turns them, pressing against Hannibal's erection with his own, rolling his hips until the man moans into his mouth. "Will," Hannibal sighs out.

Will jerks Hannibal's belt open, ripping it off and shucking his pants and underwear down, then holds Hannibal in his grip, stroking harshly. "I'm running the show right now," Will says against Hannibal's lips. "If you don't want that, say something now."

Hannibal rolls his hips, thrusting into Will's grip. "I want that," he says.

"Then strip," Will says, releasing Hannibal's cock. "Now."

Hannibal strips quietly and efficiently while Will grabs a glass bottle of olive oil off the kitchen island. "On your back, on the floor," Will says.

Hannibal obeys, stretching his lean body out fully and looking up at Will. Will doesn't think about the dead man two feet from them or the deep cleaning they're going to have to do for evidence. That beast he noticed in Hannibal is roaring in his own chest and it screams to take, claim, and seal it in blood.

He strips quickly, nearly ripping his shirt to free himself, and straddles Hannibal's waist before sitting right above the man's cock. Hannibal grips his hips in surprise.

"You're going to open me up, and then you're not going to come until I do," Will says.

Hannibal nods, shaky and in awe of the blood-streaked creature leaning over him.

Will hands Hannibal the oil, then grips the man's hair and kisses him harshly.

It's been ages since Will has done this but he's sure the clumsy fingerings of his past lovers never felt this good. He feels himself open easily to Hannibal's fingers, and the first press of Hannibal's cock into his hole makes Will bite down until blood seeps into their kiss.

Will can't help his groan as Hannibal presses deeper, but that fury in his chest when he thought Hannibal was hurt, rises up along with an insane need to mark his territory.

He rears up, planting his hands on Hannibal's chest, and clenches hard around the man's cock. Hannibal grunts, clutching Will's hips, but that doesn't stop Will from slamming his hips down, over and over. He rides Hannibal hard, and digs his nails in until blood wells up and pleasure arcs up his spine. He wants Hannibal to remember this moment and he wants to clarify to everyone else who the man under him belongs to.

Hannibal thrusts up to meet him, mouth hanging open, lips bloody, and he takes everything Will gives, even the marks he's sure to wear on his chest long after this night.

Will tilts his hips so Hannibal's cock rubs him just right on every thrust. He closes his eyes. He can't feel anything but Hannibal inside of him, holding him tightly, and always there, always there.

He's close. His thighs shake and he knows he can't hold himself up much longer when pleasure snaps through him and he comes untouched, shooting up Hannibal's chest and feeling Hannibal cry out as he comes inside Will.

His arms give out and Will falls forward, tucking his face into Hannibal's neck, reveling in the big gasps Hannibal takes and slight shake in both their legs.

Hannibal wraps his arms around Will as their heartbeats slow, and with the beast sated, Will's awareness returns. The room smells metallic and sharp with bloody body nearby and the come squished between their chests. Yet, though he feels absolutely filthy and downright hedonistic, neither of them move.

"You're mine, Hannibal," Will says in the quiet kitchen.

"And you're mine," Hannibal says.

"No more lying," Will says. "No more games, no more experiments, no more winding me up and watching me go." He doubts Hannibal can curb his impulses entirely, but Will needs to trust Hannibal at least some of the time.

Hannibal pauses. "I will try."

And maybe that will be enough. Hannibal will try not to be a manipulative shit, Will will try not to be a grumpy shit, and they'll both try to keep this thing together.

Will feels the fatigue settling in and realizes maybe murdering a guy and having bloody sex on the kitchen floor was a bit too soon for his recovery.

"I think we should move this to a more comfortable location," Hannibal says.

"Your room," Will says. "I'm not sleeping alone."

Hannibal leans back then, pushing Will's hair back with his hand. "Are you sure?" he asks, and Will knows Hannibal isn't asking about the sleeping arrangements. For the first time, Hannibal looks uncertain and vulnerable and Will kisses him deeply. "Yes," Will says. "I'm sure. About all of it. Everything," and he meets Hannibal's eyes, no longer afraid to face Hannibal's immense monstrous love.

Chapter End Notes

Thank y'all so much for reading. Hope you enjoyed it!

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